

Urban Enclosure: Contemporary Strategies of Dispossession and Reification in London's Spatial Production

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Abstract

The research assessed the new strategies for 'public spaces' (Johnson, 2009) in their relation to the 'housing' policy proposed by the mayor of London (Johnson, 2010, 2013 and 2015). These strategies were analysed in their content, social conflicts and implied concepts of development. In response to London's housing crisis, these policies intended to deliver a greater number of housing projects that focussed on big developments and regeneration schemes, as well as strong partnerships between the state and development corporations that provided specially designed financing schemes. In order to 'bring forward land' for development, the proposed tactic was to change the laws governing 'compulsory purchase', 'land assembly', 'anti-social behaviour' and 'affordable housing' (as a replacement for council housing strategies). The 'openness' of the developments between 2009 manifesto and 2014 were analysed with a methodology designed upon the literature review. Results shows a process of "urban enclosure" in London.

Keywords: Urban Enclosure; Housing; London; Privatization

Introduction

The research assessed the new strategies for 'public spaces' (Johnson, 2009) in their relation to the 'housing' policy proposed by the mayor of London (Johnson, 2010, 2013 and 2015). The formulation of the housing problem in these terms resulted in the imposition of a 'big' capital scale upon the interests of common citizens.

In order to 'bring forward land' for development, the proposed tactic was to change the laws governing 'compulsory purchase', 'land assembly', 'anti-social behaviour' and 'affordable housing' (as a replacement for council housing strategies). The result of this was the dismantling of traditional communities and urban places through a process of accumulation by dispossession (laws that stripped local citizens of older forms of wealth to which they held title) and a subsequent re-concentration of property in the hands of big real estate actors. In other words, in a time of financial crisis, architecture became a form of transforming capital into patrimonial forms associated with a renewed renter economy.

The analysis shows that the combination of large-scale housing regeneration schemes with the privatisation of public spaces resulted in an urban condition that surpassed gentrification. The current scenario in London is the combination of private tangled social control, driven spatial consumption, top-down strategies targeting the expatriate market and luxurious (empty) apartments, while former Londoners are expelled outside London's city limits. This is a controlled process of 'urban enclosure' packed up in a nice 'velvet architecture'.

Background: 'Blood Legislation' as a Tool of Reification

The process of using renewed legislation in order to expropriate common wealth is not new in England. In Part VIII of Karl Marx's *Capital* (1887), he famously analysed the process of privatisation of common land as an example of a form of 'primitive accumulation'. In that context, he demonstrated how capitalist development in England was preceded, on the one hand, by a legislative process of wealth expropriation that mainly focussed on confiscating common land and transferring its ownership into private hands. This created a dispossessed and dependent mass of proletarians. Examples of this process were the creation of the 'Enclosure Acts' by Parliament (chapter 27). On the other hand, new legislation was produced to criminalise the behaviour of the poor through a series of statutes that were created to enforce a culture of wage labour behaviour and control 'beggars' and 'vagabonds' (chapter 28, entitled 'Blood Legislation'), thus enforcing a disciplined and dependent proletariat.

De Angelis (2000) argues that Marx's 'primitive accumulation' is not a process that is concealed in time and space; rather, it is a continuous process of wealth accumulation that constantly reproduces the division of labour. In this sense, the 'primitive' has a sense of 'a priori', i.e. the base of capital accumulation that supports the separation of workers from the means of production. For De Angelis, this separation is the basis of Marx's theory of reification: the transformation of free subjects into objects in the marketplace through the alienation of the 'materials' and 'instruments' of production from the common citizens, thus imposing on them the condition of wage labour. Therefore, he argues that 'primitive accumulation could be identified in those social processes or sets of strategies aimed at dismantling institutions that protect society's from the market' (De Angelis, 2000), demonstrating how this procedure is reinforced in the neoliberal context.

Furthermore, Henri Lefebvre (1971) demonstrated how capitalism was (in the '70s) shifting from the field of 'production' to the field of 'reproduction'. In late capitalism, the process of alienation exceeds the realm of work and invades everyday life, thus reifying forms of life and behaviour as the process of capital accumulation is realised in the act of consumption. Furthermore, Wark (2004) argues that we are facing a new mode of production wherein extreme mechanisation and automation have not delivered the promises of release from work. Jonathan Crary (2013) demonstrated how physical toil has been replaced by stressful mental work. This happens because production is increased in its complexity and instability, and because this demands even more immaterial work in order to coordinate production. Even in cases of work hour reduction, labourers face an everyday life that is colonised by productivity: we rest in order to be productive, we have leisure to amplify creativity, we exercise to be more productive, we travel in order to network, and so on.

This has resulted in new forms of social reification in the production of a city's spaces by shifting focus from the workspace to a process of reifying the everyday life space as a whole. This process is being supported by a new set of legislations, and the massive 'regeneration' of the modern parts of the city, into a new urban condition.

Sharon Zukin (2010, p. 129) argues that public space has had an important role in the democratisation process. For instance, even before the French Revolution clashed against the previous classes' privileges, the mixture that was promoted by the markets' space was creating the basis for modern democracy and paving the way for the city space to be open for all. Moreover, Zukin highlights that London and New York created public spaces in the 19th century, such as libraries, parks and museums, even before the right to vote was available to everyone. Rather than just an effect or image, public spaces were also generating democracy and are, therefore, politics in praxis.

Specifically in London, the public ownership of the streets was the outcome of a long dispute that happened towards the end of 19th century (Minton, 2009, p. 19–21). By this time, major squares of the city were enclosed, guarded by private security and surrounded by sentry boxes. After a conflict with guards resulted in a murder, social unrest and the involvement of the printed media resulted in two major parliamentary inquiries. These inquiries resulted in streets becoming 'adopted' by the local

authorities, which were gaining power by this time. In this sense, the rise of the public space coincided with and represented the construction of local democracy in London.

The end of the 1980s saw the birth of a new kind of space as a result of political and economic reconfiguration. The metropolis in centralised economies faced a process of deindustrialization; which, with the increasing flexibility of work relations and the pressure of the welfare state, reframed the mass production economy into the so-called toyotist economy (Harvey, 1990). For this new neoliberal economy, a new form of space was produced.

In London, the paradigmatic example was Canary Wharf. Developed in an old industrial area, a vast new financial centre was designed from scratch, where the streets and squares were no longer 'adopted' by the weakening welfare state, but, were controlled by a new entity: the corporation.

We aim to demonstrate that, just as the very much appreciated idyllic landscape of the High Lands is the result of the Land Enclosure Acts, which violently cleared the peasant from the land (Marx, 1887, chapter 27), the velvet architecture of London is the result of a process of urban enclosure, which is supported by a new set of legislations and policies.

The Urban Enclosure in London

London's urban enclosure process follows a similar path to the Land Enclosure Acts: it is focussed on strategies of both 'behaviour control' and 'dispossession'. The process of behaviour control is being secured by an increasingly severe legislation of 'Anti-Social Behaviour Orders', as well as 'security by design' and 'public spaces privatisation' strategies. The process of dispossession was guaranteed by changes to and reinterpretation of the 'Compulsory Purchase Orders' legislation and 'Land Assembly' strategies.

These two new conditions of legality in urban production tend to produce a new form of public spaces. But, how can the enclosure effects of this new mode of spatial production in London be assessed?

Assessing the Process of Dispossession through Housing Production

Historical data collected by the organisation Shelter (2015a) demonstrated that the 1980s represent a significant decrease in the construction of social housing in England. Currently, its annual construction rate is 90% less than what was produced in the mid-1950s. In this context, the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) has been advocated as the foremost tool in producing a greater number of houses.

Although CPOs are a legal instrument that has existed since 1961 with the purpose of providing an instrument for authorities to achieve public interests (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2005), the large-scale use of CPOs as an instrument for housing production in London is a current trend. Evidence of that is the creation in 2002 of the Compulsory Purchase Association, an institution that aims to guide the promotion of the practice, expertise and networking in the matter. The result is that the majority of local authorities makes use of 1 or 2 orders per year, totalling more than 40 a year (Dees, 2012). This instrument has been advocated by the mayor of London (Johnson, 2013, p. 77) as a strategy for 'land assembly'.

Furthermore, the major shift in the use of this instrument is related to a shift of interpretation. Since the economic crisis of 2009, any benefit to the economy has been interpreted as of 'public interest'. In this sense, an instrument that is intended for the common good has been oriented to the market. In the case of a regeneration process in Barnet Council, which faced massive street protests and resistance from local residents, the council leader, Richard Cornelius, reportedly said:

'The regeneration project will transform the estate and will provide high quality and attractive new homes at a time when public finances are incredibly tight. We believe that this is very much in the public interest' (Booth, 2015).

A common justification of this process is also the austerity imposed upon local governments. The regeneration process is often connected with the process of privatising the public spaces. This process saves local authorities from the maintenance of streets and squares. A Great London Authority higher officer, when asked if the new policies on housing using CPOs could be implemented in the public spaces in a coherent manner to the public interest, answered:

'It could be coherent with it. But it will not. It is not the interest of housing developers. It is not just a problem of design. The Planning Department will not reinforce it. (...) The public management of the streets involves funding. So it need money. (...) There is a large amount of things to be done in the public space, and it is simply easier to do it with corporations and a local authority. When there is many landlords involved, things becomes difficult, and it is hard to negotiate all the interests. With a local authority holding the land it is easier. There is just no money to do otherwise' (Anonymous, 2014).

In addition to this point, data from Shelter (2015a) demonstrated that, from 2003 to 2014, the number of social rented houses remained practically stable. After 2003, there was an increasing shift from local authorities' rented houses to housing associations' rents. These associations are non-profit organisations; thus, they represented one step further in the downturn of the welfare state. Furthermore, the National Affordable Housing Programme, created in 2008, is a step further from the previous models, in which public funding is allocated to partner developers in order to deliver homes for both rent and ownership at 80% of the market price. It is supposedly a policy that provides socially committed houses. Nevertheless, a rigorous analysis reveals it to be nothing more than an instrument of wealth dispossession and property accumulation.

London's current housing policy was firstly detailed in a 2010 document (Johnson, 2010). In 2014, a draft document for consultancy was elaborated (Johnson, 2013) and, later, a final statutory document was formally approved (Johnson, 2015). The 2014 version is an especially tricky and artful text, whereas statements in the beginning support disconnected proposals in the middle. Furthermore, a careful analysis comparing the two documents (available via common document software) exposes a series of key changes. Although none of the proposals had any concessions and many of them were amended as ongoing reality, two facts are especially important. On the one hand, part 5, 'About this Strategy', which revealed the subjectivity of its choices, simply disappeared, as if the proposals were the result of mysterious technicalities. On the other hand, a vast series of sentences and paragraphs that were precisely direct and revelling statements regarding the chosen strategies were altered into obscure, labyrinthine rhetoric. The analysis of this procedure will reveal the devices of the aesthetical politics (Rancière, 2005) that govern urban space production.

This procedure of hiding artifices and intentions is not a new device. In the opening chapter of Manfredo Tafuri's (2006) magna opera on the Renaissance, he discusses the concept of 'sprezzatura'; which, in Castiglioni's book *The Courtier* (about the etiquette of the court), is the main aesthetic attitude expected from a courtier or artist. This procedure consists in creating the 'illusion' proper to the work of art (such as the 'perspective', but also applied to other realms; for instance, a courtier's 'gait'), in which transgression is concealed, what is in reality a product gains the appearance of being 'naturally artificial', and the final result 'looks effortless'. In this sense, the differences between the 2013 draft and the final version of London's housing policy are parapraxes that inadvertently reveal this ancient procedure of sprezzatura of intensions.

The examples are many; but, due to the constraints of this paper, just one will be presented. For instance, the sentence 'The GLA is particularly keen to explore the concept of a London Housing Bank

focused on large-scale developments to generate additional supply' (Johnson, 2013, p. 39) was changed to:

'The Mayor wishes to develop a London Housing Bank with the aim of accelerating the pace of development and generating additional housing supply, particularly on large sites where speed of delivery is significantly constrained by the traditional house-builder business model' (Johnson, 2015, p. 68).

A further analysis of the documents reveals many such sprezzaturas. Of great importance is the account of the Localism Act of 2011 that transferred planning powers to the Great London Authority (GLA), 'while removing the legal restriction on the Mayor to spend money on housing' (Johnson, 2013). In this case, the policy builds the discourse on public investment in the private sector to legitimise the creation of the 'London Housing Bank' as a funding body of the private sector. This is one of the main strategies in London's housing policy: 'due to the imperative for increased supply of homes of all tenures, it is expected that cross-subsidy will primarily come through the provision of open market housing' (Johnson, 2015, p. 70). 'The Mayor wants to accelerate delivery, bringing new buyers into the market via a Build to Rent fund, backed by the government's debt guarantee' (Johnson, 2013, p. 48).

In the context of financial crises, the risk of such big investments is not in the banks' interest. Therefore, all the risk is proposed to be taken by the public capital, while the profit stays in the hands of the developers. This is the case because the loans will be: 'available at below market rents for a fixed period, at the end of which the homes can be sold on. The funding provided by the public sector would be repaid, potentially including a value uplift'. (Johnson, 2013, p. 39). Therefore, developers are granted the use of public money as capital to profit with zero risk:

'the London Housing Bank should initially utilize up to £200 million of this funding (...) There will be flexible loan terms at lower than commercial rates, to enable registered providers to offer sub-market rents for the period of the loan. At the end of the loan period the Mayor will expect a positive return on the loan and the initial capital to be paid back'. (Johnson, 2015, p. 69)

Furthermore, the Localism Act 2011 created a mass transfer of land ownership to the GLA, which became the largest public landowner. Therefore, the document has a specific section on how to privatise this public land, entitled: '4.12 Bringing forward public sector land', 'by making it faster, easier and cheaper for public land owners to bring forward land for development. It establishes a framework agreement of 25 developers and contractors (...)' (Johnson, 2015, p. 77). In addition, the 'housing zones' would create a 'lighter touch planning and effective land assembly, including, where necessary, the use of compulsory purchase powers (Johnson, 2015, p. 77). In her analysis of this trend, Raquel Rolnik notes that this easy access to planning permits without any control of land speculation is leading to further land banking (UN, 2014, p. 10).

This new 'lighter touch planning' (so dear to the neoliberal rhetoric) is (not so) surprisingly accompanied by an intensive mobilisation of the state apparatus in order to benefit the big industry. 'The Mayor will use his full range of powers to get more homes built in all sectors and this will involve new initiatives to secure additional finance, bring forward the land for development and build the industry capacity' (Johnson, 2015, p. 24). If assessed fragmentally, this statement could seem as if the government is somehow retaking public control over the development of the housing sector. Nevertheless, the majority of new houses will be produced by the private sector as supposedly 'affordable houses'. To understand the 'unaffordability' of these 'affordable' houses should be sufficient to unveil this sprezzatura.

In the previously mentioned Barnet Council case, an original two-bedroom flats were offered at a value of £175,000 to those from whom they were being compulsorily purchased, whilst the new one-bedroom 'affordable' flats were expected to be sold for £415,000. In addition, the proposed scheme

would provide 199 less 'affordable' houses than previously existent social houses (Booth, 2015). Furthermore, former council tenants were not given any choice other than buying a new flat or facing the private renting market. This made it impossible for the local community to participate in the 'sustainability' of the development. This situation is similar to the city's other regeneration schemes. In the case of the Elephant and Castle regeneration scheme, 'affordable rents' are expected to be double the price of previous rents, and new flats costs almost three times the originals. (Wainwright, 2014).

In reaction, local residents created an association called Better Elephant to fight this process of dispossession using live information about the social effects of those policies. The following map was produced in order to illustrate how the scheme was displacing the current locals (Better Elephant, 2013).

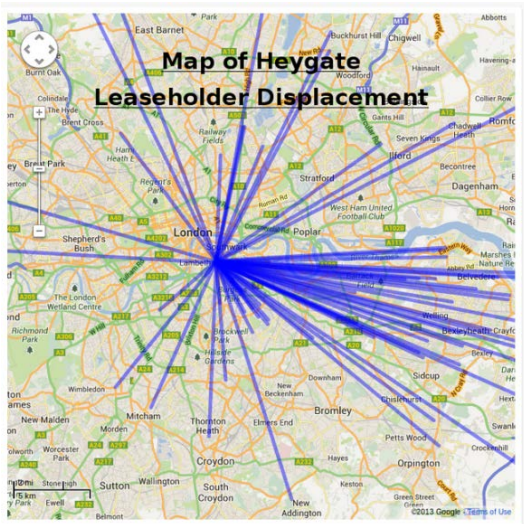


Figure 1: Map of Heygate Leaseholder Displacement. Source: Better Elephant, 2013.

In their efforts to bring forward land for development, the strategies consistently articulate tactics of compulsory purchase and land assembly that overlap the local scale. All of the solutions implement spatial production on a scale that overrides the local level. As Zukin (2010: p. 222) asserts, we may have not seen the end of history, but we are certainly seeing the end of 'place-bound culture'. Therefore, there are different housing problems that do not fit the policy document rhetoric.

The problem that needs to be solved is not that of producing as many expensive flats as possible; it is that of providing housing for Londoners. The reality that is not tackled by any of the proposals is that of the crude living conditions in London. Despite the efforts to negate this precarious condition, data from Shelter (2015b) shows that 20.6% of the houses in England are 'non-decent' (i.e. houses in bad physical condition with 'modern' facilities that are failing, not thermally adequate or fall below minimum standards). Furthermore, 35% of private rented households in England fail the Decent Homes Standard (UN, 2014, p. 8). In addition, 11.3% of London households are overcrowded (ONS, 2014).

Although London's housing problem is formulated in an illusionistic manner, the proposed way of managing the crisis creates a 'false solution'. The assumption of London's housing strategy is that an increase in private production is the solution for delivering the necessary households. Although the production of new homes is already 77% in the hands of private sector, the overall production remains less than a half the baseline needed (UN, 2014, p. 7). Therefore, London's policies are actually disenfranchising the most vulnerable of the right to adequate housing (UN, 2014, p. 20) whilst producing a massive process of property accumulation by dispossession. This reveals the device that empowers a 'naturally artificial' process of dispossession by sprezzatura.

Assessing the Enclosure of Public Spaces through Privatisation

In the book *Ground Control*, Anna Minton (2009) analyses the emergence of privatised public spaces. She argues that Canary Wharf became a model for almost all recent developments in England (Minton, 2009, p. 3-14). Such pseudo-public spaces are privately managed and are based on specific sets of strategies and rules. The result is highly managed spaces, stratification, big chain stores and corporate control over public security to avoid any disruption of capitalist activities. Besides maintaining the appearance of public spaces, these streets are not adopted by the local government.

In order to uphold the control of behaviour in urban places, the recent creation of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act in England challenges the conventional rights of citizens in the public space. Along with many mechanisms to assure dispersal powers to the police, the new law creates a mechanism in which specific punishments can address specific individuals and behaviours, depending on the understanding of a court (Minton, 2009, p. 132–178). The modern idea that the public space is a place in which people can manifest their freedom has been significantly diminished.

Moreover, Appleton (2014) analyses a new bill currently passing through the UK parliament that will ensure even more restrictions upon the public. He argues that the law gives authorities an almost free hand to control who can do what in public spaces, with complete flexibility in rule design. In this sense, there is no previous definition of what is prohibited, nor any previous definition of the scale of the sentence, thus holding people in a state of permanent self vigilance.

In addition to these measures, local authorities expect buildings and streets to be designed according to the guidance of 'Security by Design' manuals (Minton, 2009: 61–82). These manuals establish a series of design measures that incorporate implicit strategies into physical objects. Thus, space is filled with social rules that are designed strategically in order to avoid conflict, control use, orient behaviour and guarantee a business-friendly environment. Therefore, both Appleton (2014) and Zukin (2010) emphasise that laws are increasingly a mixture of authorities' wish to control and business' interests.

Foucault (1980) and Deleuze (1990) argued that, with modernisation, capitalism moved from a centralised society that was controlled by despotic power with a strict hierarchy and direct modes of punishment and control towards a disciplinary society that was organised by a strong bureaucracy in which the decentralisation of control was enabled through a rigid set of laws and education. Henri Lefebvre (1971) called that society 'The Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption'. Furthermore, in one of his latest works, Gilles Deleuze (1990) asserts that society is moving towards a new form of social organisation in which the economy is organised by virtual machines, with a new kind of social control being born that is much more diffuse and implicit.

This diffusion of control is one element that makes it difficult to assess the enclosure of public spaces. Furthermore, there is a conceptual difficulty in defining the openness of a public space. The related literature presents multiple methodologies that assess the 'publicness' of a place into divergent grids and concepts (Varna and Tiesdell, 2010, Benn and Gauss, 1983, Kohn, 2004, Németh and Schmidt, 2011, Németh, 2012, Lessing, 2001, Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008, Iveson, 2007). A review of this literature provided two main themes for a first-phase analysis based on publicly available data. In a second phase of the research, a more qualitative approach used techniques of field study and the development of a form to notate the observations. This form was created by a critical synthesis of the many methodologies to measure the 'publicness' of spaces, resulting in 36 elements/criteria to be checked.

The first phase of the research was accomplished by an initial inventory conducted by combining information from various entities, including the planning portal of the UK government, the Greater London Authority website, the British Property Federation website and the New London Architecture organisation, as well as the websites of major property corporations and local authorities. From an initial list of 1024 projects, 708 developments were found to be already completed. After that, the approval dates of the projects were searched. It was not possible to determine the approval date of 32

projects; therefore, these were eliminated from the analysis. 101 projects fit the criteria of having been approved after the mayor's first policy documents were drafted. Of those, 25 were found to not enter the realm of public and private boundaries (being mainly internal refurbishments). Each one of the 32 boroughs and the Corporation of the City of London have different websites with different search engines, which means that the information is neither transparent nor accountable and was extremely hard to assemble.

The remaining 76 cases were, initially, analysed through their projects' online information. The following figure represents the degree of enclosure of these spaces. The first bar represents the scale of the public realm impact: 31 projects (40.8%) made a large enclosure impact on the surroundings (red); 31 projects (40.8%) made small impacts (yellow); and 14 projects (18.4%) did not impact on the openness of the public environment (green). The second row represents the public space privatisation: 42 projects (55.3%) resulted in large privatisations (red); 27 projects (35.5%) privatised few aspects of the space (yellow), and 7 projects (9.2%) did not privatise any aspect of public spaces (green). The last bar represents the sum of the two indexes (for each project), resulting in a diagram of the public space's 'coefficient of conversion' into privatised public space.

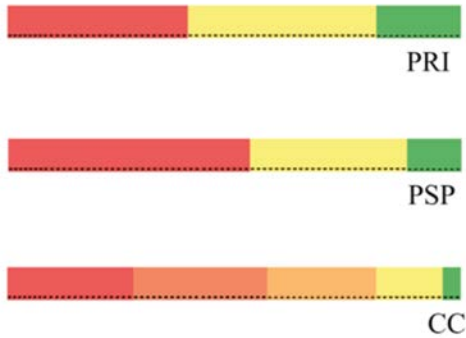


Figure 2: Public Realm Impact (PRI), Public Space Privatisation (PSP), Conversion Coefficient (CC). Source: the author.

In the second phase of the assessment, 20 spaces with different private/public arrangements were subjected to a field investigation that collected the information on the 36 previously mentioned criteria. The following diagram represents the degree of enclosure of those public spaces in London.

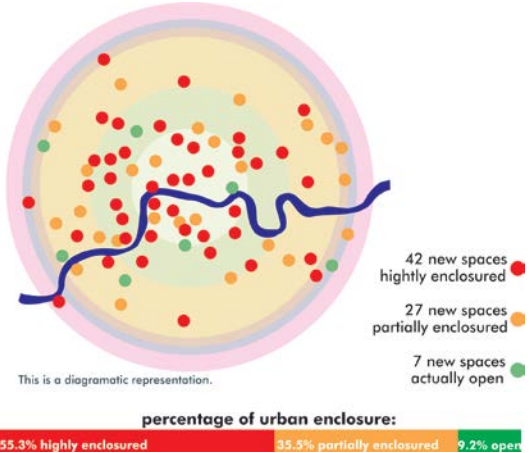


Figure 3: The enclosure of public spaces in London. Source: the author.

The critical analysis of the dynamic and interaction among the criteria that were associated with the field observations and the theoretical grounding process (Guest et al., 2011) resulted in three concepts (in addition to dispossession by sprezzatura) to reveal the aesthetic politics of these new forms of spaces. These concepts are velvet ground, tangled orbits and driven spatial consumption.



Figure 4: film frame of 1 new street square. Source: the author.



Figure 5: Film Frame of Aloft Hotel. Source: the author.



Figure 6: Film Frame of Renaissance Development. Source: the author.



Figure 7: Velvet Ground. Source: the author.

Velvet architecture is the proper product of the regeneration process that is mediated by techniques of spectacle, in the sense that the foreground presents a phantasmagorical image that transforms citizens into spectators that are surrounded by an anaesthetic (untouchable) environment (similar to the comfort one experiences while sitting in the darkness of a cinema). The sensation is of velvet spaces built on the negation of the former difficult experience of freedom in the city, as can be seen in the case studies, as well as the following examples. Thus, velvet architecture provides both comfort and spectacle.

New Street Square is an utterly enclosed space. Walking down the street, the development is easily perceived. Predominantly grey, the cluster of buildings has gaps only in its corners, like spatial fissures that create a passage through the bordering complex towards the inner square. On the other side, in a calmer street, the boundaries of public/private space are drawn as amoeboid curves that skirt dispersed benches, upon which a working-class figure is seated at the extreme end of the line.

The Aloft development is also highly enclosed. In order to arrive at the hotel, which is located in London's Docklands, pedestrians coming from the Docklands Light Railway must walk through suspended platforms that are fluidly connected to the station and the Excel exhibition centre. A long, smooth perspective connects the entrances without any stairs. As they cross the platform, walkers can see a square in the lower level.

The Renaissance development is moderately enclosed. Coming from the station, before arriving at the site, we first reach a square by passing through old brick arches. This reminiscence creates a tactile historicity, warming the senses as we approach the colourful glass and metal building.



Figure 8: Tangled Control. Source: the author.

The institution of multiple specific rules, with each place imposing a different set of use norms (such as prohibition of bikes, drinking, or the necessity of leaving a licence on a parking vehicle) transforms the city into an intertwined set of *tangled orbits* of hierarchy and control. The city becomes a fragmented atmosphere, as if the 'manual' we need to use a place must be changed at each step along the way, maintaining a constant feeling of impossible idiosyncratic experience within the space. Every object has its place. In this condition, users easily hand over control to the place's automate fractal structure. In this condition of uncertainty, one tends to behave as one immediately assumes to be appropriate to the scenario. This condition is reinforced by hidden artifices of 'security by design' and, of course, anti-social behaviour legislation, which embodies the censorship.

In the example of New Street Square (Film Frame 1), the pavement has boundaries in shades of grey, like invisible barriers controlling one's behaviour and directing one's walk. A silver totem with maps, textual information and a CCTV icon marks the entrance of this urban fissure, ensuring visitors are apprised of the new set of rules. Everybody wears suits in the square; most of them pass each other in a hurry. Two figures in full black stand in front of the different buildings, aligned and static. As I walk around, I imagine that one of them is watching me; therefore, I take hidden pictures.

In the case of Aloft Hotel (Film Frame 2) a profusion of signs is attached to lampposts, each bearing rules, CCTVs, and icons that remind you that you are being watched. The myriad of bollards creates boundaries without barriers, thus composing a strange choreography. In the same sense, benches seem to dance out of cracks in the pavement. The place appears overdesigned, as if the invisible hand of the architect was being corrupted by the dirt left behind by each footstep, and you wonder where he pictured you should stand or sit.

In the Renaissance estate (Film Frame 3), the shapelessness of the square is subtly coordinated by a pavement grid that provides references to what otherwise would be interstitial space. As in other places, the tortuous lines in the pavement surround small objects, twisting from one side to the other and swinging across walkers' trajectories. Furniture also presents itself as an omnipresent gesture of design, giving identity and structure. Although pins in the benches avoid skaters, massive totems announce information and the private/public partnership that made this place possible, nailing a peculiar sense of unbounded placeness into the ground.



Figure 9: Driven Spatial Consumption. Source: the author.

This condition creates a strange kind of anxiety produced by a sense of distance wherein architecture is no longer appropriated by distraction (as in the modern metropolis); instead, it occurs only if it is mediated by an act of possession. In this condition, the subject only shares the place experience through the 'game' of consumption (what may be called *driven spatial consumption*).

In Land Securities website's own words, New Street Square (Film Frame 1) is thus outlined: 'There has been a real sense of magic around New Street Square since it opened, with the dramatically expanded public realm being used for everything from live sports screenings to local food markets'. Entering the square, which is designed as a patio surrounded by buildings, it is possible to observe many people seated in cafes drinking cappuccino and eating pasta, while only one person is seated in a square bench.

Something slightly different happens in the square in front of Aloft Hotel (Film Frame 2). More as a desire never to be fulfilled than an object to be reached, the square is seen in its total design from the top down. Suspended walkways connect the DLR station to the glass lobby, upon which warm hosts can delight the view of a windy landscape of old, freezing docks.

As with many other new developments, Renaissance (Film Frame 3) is a mixed-use complex. In front of the cultural complex, a poster, from the Lewisham Borough in partnership with Fusion Management Organisation proudly announces: 'The great outdoors Now even greater'. Consumers are offered the opportunity to kindly pay for group exercise classes (yoga, Pilates, Zumba, pump) in the backstreet park, thus fully realising the extension of commodification from body fitting to outdoors experience.

The Aesthetics of the Enclosed Experience

For some authors (such as De Magalhães, 2010) there is no reason to be 'overpessimistic'. For them, if you are that type of person, you owe this to a frozen, idealised concept of public space. For them, it is just a matter of recognising the 'natural' necessity of the current developments, as the bankruptcy of welfare state is an unquestionable fact (De Magalhães, 2010: p. 560). In this sense, the only possible action is to technically understand the process and, by so doing, being able to control it. For De Magalhães, the ongoing process can be described as a simple 'contracting out' of the public character of the cities' spaces, and the heart of the matter is to know how to make good contracts to balance rights and duties. He argues this is not a history of 'corporate take-over' or 'exclusion' but a 'complex redistribution of roles' and a 'domestication' of public spaces.

Nevertheless, this complex fragmentation of rules into multiple contracts creates a space formed by fractal rules, malicious domestications, blurred boundaries and the prevention of significant differences. Dissent, as the basis of the polis (Rancière, 2005), is one of the first targets of these many rules. This de-politicisation of public spaces, the forbiddance of politic in the polis, became evident during the Occupy movements and is a fundamental shift in the character of public space that cannot be undermined. Anesthetised by the constant vibration of the 'urban life', the wandering citizen represses his innermost values by experiencing the place only through repeating consumption and regains control only by playing games.

On one hand, the discussion is not about reaffirming the states' lost control of space. As Zukin (2010: p. 30) asserts, in the current situation the state plays a strong role in guaranteeing that big business gains control over the city. As she demonstrated in the case of the WTC in New York, state control can be even more repressive, more ideological and less representative than other kinds of spatial intervention (Zukin, 2010: p. 150–158). On the other hand, there are two dimensions of this 'contracting out' of the public space. On one dimension, the social actors involved in the contract are very well informed about the elements and the rights that have been sold. And, if this situation took place in first place, it was certainly because of that awareness. Therefore, the academics' formalisation of the praxis has no effect upon that reality. In the second dimension, in the lived space, the reality is the fragmentation of rules, promoted by these contracts, which transforms the public space in a tangled orbit of rules that changes from place to place, square to square, street to street. Citizens, in a walk through the city of London, experience no confrontation with difference, but rather a metamorphosis of its own character, becoming constantly more or less free, more or less familiar, more or less active, more or less humble. For those in the streets, the feeling is a constant shining, blurred yet soft displacement of the velvet space.

Many intellectuals have observed the connection between metropolitan space and social freedom (Simmel, 1903, Lefebvre, 1991, Berman, 1990, Baudelaire, 1995, Sennet, 2002, inter alia). Although this connection could hardly be dismissed, there is a great deal of complexity in the topic. This relationship has changed in different historical moments and cities have played different roles in the formation of modern citizenship.

Marshal Berman (1990) examines how different cities in the 19th century transformed the citizens' social perception. Contrasting the boulevard's experience in Paris with the Prospect's experience in Saint Petersburg, Berman demonstrates the intimate relation between the social awareness and the city forms.

Moreover, Georg Simmel (1903), from a different perspective, analyses how the experience of the metropolis changes modern men's consciousness and, therefore, social relations. For Simmel, the modern city creates an intensification of 'nervous stimulation', a continuous confrontation with the unexpected, a highly impersonal relationship with others, an abstract mode of mediation (money) and, therefore, the necessity of fast reactions. That situation leads to the unconditional use of rationality. In other words, by these new features, the modern man is ripped apart from the old 'orbit' of the feudal village. Therefore, for Simmel the metropolis experience generates freedom by the transcending of its own displacement, thus only accounting to its 'inner laws'.

Nevertheless, as we saw, the ongoing process is generating a new set of tangled social 'orbits'. In addition, this 'blurred' boundaries of the cities' are associated with the effects of comfort mediated by consumption. Richard Sennet (2002) challenges the idea that the city should be seen as a comfortable space. For him, this idea of calmness is a social construction that conceives citizens as passive elements, rather than the city as an instable arrangement and the citizens' individuality as an incomplete condition.

Therefore, to live in cities is to confront ourselves with contradictory experiences that reveal our incompleteness and the cognitive dissonance of our senses (Sennet, 2002, p. 371). Sennet argues that the move from Christianity to Modernity changed rituals for labour and self-discipline wherein comfort was directed to home and fatigue to the workplace, thereby suspending the sensory functions of the body. A passive relationship with the environment was built by the anaesthesia offered at home, on the one hand, and the disciplinary punishment in the street, on the other. Today we observe the emergence of a new kind of sensory suspension that is formed by both velvet discipline and tangled alienation.

Therefore, Sennet argues that the urge to experience comfort in the cities is a dangerous game. Too much protection from 'stimuli' can create a 'sickness of lack'. He argues that pleasure can only emerge

as a distension of unpleasurable experiences, and that we need to confront ourselves with the 'reality principle' in order to acknowledge to what degree our mind is playing with our senses of pleasure and unpleasure.

This idea is founded in the Freudian text 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (Freud, 1962) in which it is argued that, although unpleasure and pleasure are important elements to understand mental life, it is the process of 'repression of desires' that is the key principle. Freud asserted: 'Most of the unpleasure that we experience is perceptual unpleasure', because our instincts and desires are repressed inside our unconscious by our social experience. This perceptual unpleasure is formed, in such cases, by the expectations of unpleasure and danger, or by the pressure of unsatisfied instincts. Therefore, a conflict emerges between the repressed unconscious and the actual experience, creating a compulsion to repeat the manifestations of that repressed desire. Those manifestations can emerge as painful experiences or accepted social games. Freud explains this condition by describing a game played by a child. The child repeatedly threw a toy behind the bed in order to enjoy reencountering this toy when he found it. The child achieved, by incessantly repeating the disappearance of an object and its rediscovery, a form of revenge and the feeling of mastery over his destiny. Therefore, the child regained control over the passivity of his experience only through a 'game activity' (Freud, 1962: p. 17).

Latham and Koch (2013, p. 6) presented how the passivity of the urban experience is overcome through a tale of a 'piano in a square'. In a regenerated London square, a man saw a piano in the street and asked the waiter if he could sit on the chair, only to be shown a sign reading, 'Play Me. I'm Yours!' After playing music and being applauded by the surrounding customers, who kept asking him for 'one more', the man left. The passivity of his experience in the velvet architecture of London was joyfully overcome through a planned 'game activity' device.

Additionally, a more subtle game is in force. In enclosed spaces, the anxiety of the experience (generated by the multiple reifications of social rules in such spaces) is swamped by the specific game of consumption. The feeling of belonging is carefully orchestrated so one only feels suited to the space as he engages in the consumption game. Tables and chairs, as well as views and pianos, are carefully orchestrated by business intentions. In Simmel's metropolis, the mediation of relations was, indeed, commanded by money, which became 'the common denominator of all values'. However, in the modern metropolis, money worked as an abstract element to intermediate differences. In the contemporary enclosed spaces, money is not only a device of mediation in the space; it is furthermore the device of ephemeral place-bound production. Thus, the former blasé abstract distance is transformed into domesticated and consumed closeness. This is the repeated game of consumption, a game of incessantly repeating the disappearance of citizenship and its reencounter in the form of commodity.

Conclusions

The analysis of the new housing and public space strategies in the production of spaces in London reveals the mechanisms through which the urban space is being enclosed. The combined analysis of textual documents, data collection, field qualitative interpretation and theoretical reflection made it possible to formulate a grounded theory of the contemporary production of reified urban forms.

These new forms produce a similar effect to the process of primitive accumulation, in which the citizen is progressively separated from the means of free place appropriation at the same pace at which reified behaviours are imposed. This procedure is made possible by strategies of 'sprezzatura', which hide the commodification of place and create a sense of 'naturally artificial' social order.

This new condition of 'urban enclosure' reasserts the role of cities in the global economy by amplifying the reification of social relations beyond the realm of work to encompass the entire scenario of one's everyday experience in the city. The process of dispossession by sprezzatura transforms users into 'free sellers' of their citizenship through deceiving mechanisms of tangled social rules, driven spatial consumption and velvet architecture.

Cosy and kind, domestic and comfortable, these bird-nest prisons differ from the former means of control (panoptical and gridded) and operate through disorientation and refuge, rather than discipline and punishment.

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